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AUTHOR McHugh, James
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ABSTRACT

In the United Kingdom social workers perform two major functions: they work with students with behavior problems who have been referred to them by schools as a last resort, and they ensure that needy students receive benefits such as clothing, maintenance allowances, boarding school assistance, and transportation to and from school. These services are available through the Education Welfare Service, the social service department of the social authority, and through both school- and nonschool-based social workers. However, students need a comprehensive preventive social work service available throughout their school years. Research involving 120 adult offenders indicated that these offenders had experienced school-related difficulties as children. Individual case studies of students further illustrate the inadequacy of the present system in the early identification of problem students and the consequences of this inadequacy. Although social workers can improve their services by working with children, parents, teachers, and other professionals, attention must be paid to schools as institutions and to the educational experience which they provide in order to address the growing problem of older children's disaffection for school. The most common reasons children give for truancy involve institutional factors, the curriculum, and emphasis on examinations. New curricula to better meet the needs of disaffected students must consider the emotional, social, and vocational needs of the students, together with the inclusion of subjects of direct relevance to the world of work. (NRB)

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A PREVENTATIVE SOCIAL WORK SERVICE TO SCHOOLS: THE CASE FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

James McHugh
British Association of Social Workers
Birmingham, England

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Social Workers, New Orleans, LA, January 31-February 3, 1985.

A PREVENTATIVE SOCIAL WORK SERVICE TO SCHOOLS -

THE CASE FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

SUMMARY

This paper attempts to justify the creation of a comprehensive preventative social work service for school children which would be available throughout their school lives. It outlines provisions for material assistance available to school children in the United Kingdom, as well as describing the different ways in which attempts are made to address their problems.

A study carried out by the author in 1978 is then described which highlights the failure of the school system to identify serious maladjustment sufficiently early in children's lives in order to prevent serious problems developing later. The study also raises important questions about teachers' perceptions of children's needs and illustrates the importance of social work intervention in the school setting as well as the contribution a social work perspective can make to the relationship between school staff and children in difficulties.

The paper then examines the case for the creation of a social work service to schools; it emphasises the need for teachers to broaden their traditional ways of assessing children's needs and it considers the specific contribution which social work could make in the school setting - this being based on a tri-partite approach to children's needs involving the child, his parents and teachers within a multi-disciplinary perspective.

Finally, the paper considers the growing problem of disaffection from school amongst older children; it examines some of the reasons for non-school attendance, the significance of curriculum design, the emphasis which is placed upon examinations and the consequences of this situation for the large proportion of children for whom examinations are an irrelevance. A case is then made for curricula to be introduced which would better meet the needs of disaffected children and it is suggested that this can best be achieved by taking into account the emotional, social and vocational needs of children, together with the inclusion of subjects of direct relevance to the world of work.

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SERVICES FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The following is a list of functions in relation to school children which might be described as social work functions.

1. Help in Relation to Problems of Behaviour

Where experiments have been conducted with school-based social workers, the most frequent reason for a school referring a child has been because of behavioural problems, often of an aggressive or disruptive nature within the school. Unfortunately, however, the referral is often an act of desperation which is resorted to when all else fails. Consequently, the social worker is often expected to work wonders and if unable to do so, social work may be discredited in the school's eyes. Social work help is usually indicated where there are behavioural problems but this is not of a magical kind and needs to be co-ordinated with all the agencies who are concerned with the child and his family if it is to be effective. Another aspect of the situation, of which it is important to be aware, is the fact that a social worker can only offer help on an individual basis whereas the child's behaviour may well be a product of the group (class) dynamics operating at the time which precipitated the referral and these can only be dealt with in the class situation. This points to the need to assess referrals carefully as to the potential value of social work intervention in every case. It may well be for example, that it is the child's parents or teachers who require help, rather than the child himself. Often teachers may need someone with whom they can share anxieties concerning the child and teachers can often be greatly helped by a social worker providing basic social information about the child, thus enabling the teacher to understand the child's needs better. Often, such help may mean the teacher and parents communicating better with one another.

2. Help with Material Aid, Welfare Rights, Benefits, etc.

The Education Act: 1944, confers extensive powers on education authorities to provide aid for children attending school, as well as including a general duty to "contribute towards the physical as well as the spiritual, moral and mental development of the community." Specific provisions include:

Clothing	(Local Education Authorities may provide clothing for pupils and costs may be recovered from parents)
School Uniform	
Maintenance Allowance	(LEA's are empowered to help pupils who remain at school after attaining the compulsory school leaving age)
Boarding Education	(LEA's may give financial assistance to children attending normal boarding schools)
Boarding Education (Handicapped)	(LEA's may meet fees and boarding expenses for handicapped children and they can also pay for clothing, pocket money and travelling expenses (both for the child and parental visits)
Transport	(LEA's provide transport for children under 8 who live over 2 miles from their school or over 3 miles for older pupils)

These powers are of a permissive kind and consequently local authorities do not always provide this assistance. It is part of the social work task to ensure that anyone who is in need of and is entitled to benefits should receive them: it seems quite intolerable if, through lack of money, etc., a child is not able to take full advantage of the opportunities that a school provides.

PROVISION OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES TO SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

1. The Education Welfare Service

The Education Welfare Service developed from the requirement that local authorities ensure that children attend schools. It is closely associated with the education department and carries out certain administrative duties of the department, e.g. the enforcement of byelaws regarding the employment of school children, the issuing of bus passes, etc. Although the service has been integrated with the schools, like most other sections within education departments which are not primarily concerned with providing formal education, the education welfare service has been accorded a low priority and status and its development has therefore been seriously neglected. Generally, training for education welfare officers has lagged behind training for other social workers and in many authorities their work is mostly concerned with school attendance problems and the administration of byelaws and regulations. The service has often been school-centred and "welfare" has been interpreted in accordance with the needs of the school rather than the children. Accountability is firstly to the school and communication tends to be with the head teacher only. As a consequence of the locus of control of the education welfare service, it has not achieved its full social work potential unlike other services, e.g. the Probation Service or Social Service Departments.

2. A Social Work Service provided by the Social Services Department of the Local Authority

In some authorities responsibility for education welfare has been transferred to social service departments. The schools themselves have generally not welcomed this development as they feel a degree of isolation and are sometimes resentful that their own welfare workers have been taken from them. Teachers sometimes feel that the social workers who have replaced them do not give sufficient priority to this aspect of their work and this has led to a distancing between the two professions, often to the detriment of children. Consequently, referrals tend not to be made to social workers except in extreme situations and often too late so that social work intervention may be further discredited, being unable to satisfy the school's expectations.

3. School-Based Social Workers

In some areas social workers are employed full-time in providing a service to schools. For example, in Scotland, there is a separate school social work section of the social work department where teams are attached to secondary schools with their feeder primary schools and these social workers liaise closely with their colleagues in the area teams and with the school attendance officers who retain responsibility for the enforcement of school attendance. This liaison enables a comprehensive social work service to be provided. It also provides for the early identification of those children whose non-attendance indicates deeper problems requiring social work help. This takes further the important process of social work and education meeting on common ground and establishing professional contact and trust. The disadvantage of this system however, is that time and effort is spent in co-ordination and communication and in bringing teachers and social workers together. Social workers based in area teams may, because of other pressures of work, dis-associate themselves from involvement with schools and there is a danger that the school social work service may become isolated from community social services. However, in some areas, social workers have been appointed to the staff of schools and they appear to have had a significant impact on some social problems, e.g. delinquency and non-attendance, according to research carried out by Dr. Gordon Rose at Manchester University into schools in Lancashire.

4. Non-School-Based Social Workers

Other experiments have been conducted where a social work service has been provided to schools but the social worker has not been based at the school, e.g. a project reported by Karen Lyons: "Social Work and the School" HMSO 1073. Karen Lyons found many advantages in focusing her attention upon referrals from schools. She found that primary schools offered considerable scope for preventive work and for co-ordinating all the services available for a child and his family at a time when they may be most effective. She found, however, that as a social worker she could be most effective by being clearly dis-associated from the school and in no way accountable to it.

CHILDREN WHO "FALL THROUGH THE NET"

The following two case studies, which involve a brother and sister who attended the same school, illustrate vividly the inadequacy of the present arrangements for identifying children in need sufficiently early and the consequences for a child's development of the failure to do so:

Case 1

John came to the attention of the social services department at the age of 12 when he was made ths subject of a care order, following the commission of several offences of theft from his school teachers. As a baby he was placid and slow in his development; he was nervous, enuretic, suffered from eczema and was also asthmatic. His behaviour at school had always been difficult from the age of 6. He was disruptive in class and occasionally aggressive with other children. He was eventually found to be of low intelligence and was later assessed by an educational psychologist who arranged for him to be transferred to a Special School when he was 12. During the following 4 years he was involved in numerous offences of increasing seriousness, culminating in his being given a custodial sentence.

This example raises a number of important questions:

1. Why was not John's IQ assessed sooner, given that he had been disruptive in class from the age of 6?

2. Why was he not transferred to a Special School before the age of 12?

3. Could his subsequent maladjustment and delinquency have been prevented by social work intervention in the first place?

Case 2

The second case study is that of John's sister: Kate who was made the subject of a care order at the age of 14 for non-attendance at school. She had not attended school for over 3 years, yet, it appeared that no action had been taken by the education department to remedy the situation during this period. Kate spent her time playing in a nearby park and in the lifts of local flats, she feeling unable to return home as her parents would not have condoned her truancy. At a subsequent case conference it was discovered that Kate h een assessed with a view to her being placed in a Special School, prior to her t nsfer to senior school. A decision was taken not to seek a Special School place at this time, but rather to await re-referral from her senior school teacher when her needs would be assessed once again. However, no such referral was made and the school decided to deal with Kate's truancy and delinquent behaviour themselves. I became Kate's social worker following the making of the care order and it soon became apparent that the school were at their wits end as they did not know how to cope with her by now well-established pattern of truancy, and unco-operative behaviour in school. At the same time, the school refused to seek a Special School placement for Kate's final year but after a case conference was held, this was agreed to and a place was found. As a consequence, Kate's attendance improved dramatically, as did her attitude to school.

This case study raises further issues:

1. Why did the problem of Kate's truancy remain unaddressed for 3 years, especially since it exposed her to moral danger?

2. Why was Kate assessed as being in need of special education prior to transfer to secondary school and yet no place was found for her?

3. Further, had not a social worker become involved with Kate she would have remained inappropriately placed in the school system and her behaviour would have deteriorated even further.

It seems clear from discussions with colleagues in the field that problems regarding non-school attendance are very common amongst children known to social workers. Moreover, there are indications that school-related difficulties are prevalent in the early lives of adult offenders. In a study undertaken by the writer in 1978 involving 120 adult offenders, approximately:

60% Experienced difficulties at school

25% Had been assessed as educationally sub-normal

55% Left without any formal qualifications

66% Had poor relationships with their families

24% Experienced mental illness or instability

65% Came from poor families

Although only 2 cases have been cited, they are illustrative of a much wider problem within our schools.

THE CASE FOR PROVIDING A SOCIAL WORK SERVICE TO SCHOOLS

Children in difficulty can best be helped by a multi-disciplinary approach involving parents, teachers, children, social workers and other specialists. All too often only one perspective, i.e. that of the teaching staff is brought to bear on children's problems and this is often not helpful to the child concerned. It is easy for schools to ignore the influence that children's families exert on them and to make plans for a child without involving them. Children, far more than adults, are dependent on their immediate social environment, which fashions their physical, psychological and emotional development. Teachers and social workers are in danger of falling into the trap of concentrating their attention on the child - teachers perhaps more so than social workers because of the nature of their professional role and training. It seems axiomatic that professional services for school children should be provided within the context of full parental involvement if they are to be effective. Moreover, the knowledge that schools acquire about children and the opportunities they provide need to be co-ordinated in order to ensure as healthy a social development as possible. Social workers and teachers need therefore, to work closely with each other in order to achieve this end. It seems likely that meeting children's/parents' needs and supporting the efforts which schools make to do so, could best be done by developing a social work service with the specific function of working with schools, children and families. Such a service would provide an important resource in terms of prevention and early treatment of social and emotional problems. It could also assist school staff in finding ways of coping with children who frustrate the schools' attempts to develop their potential. It could enlighten the school concerning its effects upon children/families, if necessary acting as their advocate and assist school staff in working out ways to deal with problems.

The social worker could be available to class teachers and pastoral counsellors to discuss children who may be causing concern; advise teachers on how they might best help these children; identify/assess jointly with the school staff, children who have social or emotional problems; individually counsel children in school and/or parents referred by staff or by themselves; work with children on the basis of a treatment plan; work with groups of children/parents who have similar problems; organise and attend case conferences, refer cases to other services for help; assist staff in screening new entrants to schools; maintain case records; advise parents of rights and responsibilities and about welfare benefits available and develop projects to improve home/school relationships.

DISAFFECTION FROM SCHOOL - THE PROBLEM OF NON-ATTENDANCE AMONGST OLDER CHILDREN

Necessary though a social work service may be for school children, this alone will not be sufficient to deal with the growing problem of older children's disaffection from school and if this trend is to be countered, attention will have to be paid to schools as institutions and the educational experience which they provide for children. There is a considerable problem in the United Kingdom at present amongst children in their final years at school, since more and more of them are not attending school regularly. It is recognised amongst social workers in education that the reasons for non-attendance are complex. They are also instructive as research by K. C. Reid indicates. In an article in 1982 entitled: "Some Social Psychological and Institutional Factors related to Persistent School Absenteeism" Reid talks to children of their reasons for missing school. Three main reasons emerged, as the statistics below indicate:

Reasons for:	First Missing School	Continuing to Miss School
Sociological:	28%	40%
Psychological:	16%	24%
Institutional:	56% (Curriculum & examinations accounts for 10.2% of this figure)	86% (Curriculum & examinations accounts for 16.4% of this figure)

The statistic of particular significance is that relating to the institutional factors which caused children to stay away from school, the curriculum and emphasis on examinations being of particular importance. A review of secondary education in England by the Inspectors of the Education Department 1980 showed that many children were not well served by the curricula structure and organisation of the school, and that secondary schools often expect too little from their pupils at all levels. Also, the emphasis which schools and society place upon examinations means that society marks out failures very early on: since only 60% of pupils are prepared for examinations, this leaves a high proportion of children who leave school without any formal qualifications. Pupils can easily become disillusioned by their own lack of achievement at school and opt out rather than struggle on and be seen to fail. Further, the present economic situation leads young people to have low expectations of themselves since there are no jobs available when they leave school. The curriculum fails to deal with this problem and consequently young people leave totally unprepared for their future lives either in or out of employment.

The relevance of the school curriculum and the emphasis upon examination success as evidence of a high level of achievement, is therefore called into question. The stress on examinations offers little scope for emotional growth, increasing maturity and a sense of responsibility for self and others, all of which could be regarded as important aims of education.

How then might the curriculum be altered so as to better provide for children's development? Jackie Gilfoyle, Janet Harrison-Mee and Rosemarie Roberts in an article entitled: "Disaffected Youth and the 5th Year Curriculum" published in the journal of the National Association of Social Workers in Education, March 1984, suggest a number of broad aims for the curriculum. Firstly, it should develop pupils' ability to think and learn which can be applied generally to all areas rather than to specific subjects. Secondly, they place emphasis on developing pupils' personal qualities, e.g. their sense of responsibility for themselves and others and the ability to develop personal relationships. Amongst the possible methods which they suggest might be employed are small-group and individual project work, problem-solving related to experience and discussions of contemporary issues. With the emphasis being placed on integrated learning, maths, for example, might be part of a project concerned with decorating a room, along with art and design, science, etc. Pupils could be involved in choosing their subjects of study, selecting topics and/or work experience. This might provide greater scope for developing individual interests and produce a higher motivation to learn. A negotiated curriculum and contract learning could be introduced in addition to a tutorial system to look at individual needs in order to monitor progress.

Other important aspects which might be included in the new curriculum could be:

(a) Basic skills, literacy and numeracy.

(b) Technical literacy, i.e. knowledge of common household and work-place equipment, radio, TV, videos, tape recorders, etc. in addition to microchipped based systems.

(c) Creative art which currently has a low status in traditional curricula. However, this is very important as a source of self-expression, pleasure and as a leisure outlet. It is important in the development of personality and could provide a resource for periods of unemployment.

(d) Political education. This is sadly lacking in traditional curricula, young people often emerging from school with little or no knowledge of the political system and the way in which it affects our everyday lives.

(e) Planned work experience and community involvement which could include working in old peoples' homes, nurseries or on voluntary community projects. This is important for young people as mixing with adults increases maturation, self-confidence in addition to practical knowledge of the world outside the school environment.

Such an individualised learning programme implies a need for assessment, individual counselling and careers guidance on a personal level. Measurement of achievement in all these areas could be done by a system of recording or profiling in which pupils would also play a part and which would be more indicative of their abilities and skills than the present examination systems. These changes in curriculum imply a corresponding need to change fundamentally the organisation of schools and of teaching methods. Perhaps a greater challenge than this however, are the implications of a totally new way of thinking about education, the questioning of what is and what should be taught in schools and the value society places on the education of young people.

It can be argued that even academically able pupils who succeed in school are not provided with the social skills, knowledge and attitude needed for our sophisticated and fast-changing society. Even if they have been successful in their school career, they may still find themselves totally unprepared for the schock of failure and rejection in the real world. Schools teach intellectual rather than emotional growth, even though it is on our own personal resources and strength on which we most need to rely in day-to-day living. Although many schools may say that they attempt to deal with personal development this is often given insufficient recognition or status and is only rarely timetabled. The result is alienation and violence. The usual palliatives, i.e. youth clubs and community centres are no solution as they can only work if the motivation is there in the first place. Of course, it is not solely the fault of the schools that so many children fail; society dictates the kind of education required. We therefore need to question society's expectations of the educational process.

James McHugh
Professional Officer
British Association of Social Workers

16 Kent Street,
Birmingham, B5 6RD.
England.

Tel: Birmingham (021) 622 3911